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THE SITUATION IN BURUNDI

Letter dated 14 January 1997 from the Permanent Representative of Burundi to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I have the honour to transmit herewith the text of a document issued by the Government of Burundi reflecting what really happened during the unfortunate incident that led to the death of about 100 people in Kobero, in Muyinga province (see annex).

My Government would be very grateful if you would have this letter and the attached communiqué, which sheds light on this tragic event, circulated as an official document of the General Assembly under agenda item 43.

(Signed) Nsanze TERENCE
Ambassador
Permanent Representative

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ANNEX

Communiqué issued on 14 January 1997 by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation of Burundi

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation wishes to report to the public, at home and abroad, the actual chain of events leading to the death, on 10 January 1997, of about 100 Burundian citizens expelled from the United Republic of Tanzania at the border post of Kobero, in Muyinga province.

1. As soon as this serious incident was reported, the Government of Burundi dispatched a preliminary commission of inquiry to the location. The commission was composed of high-ranking civilians and senior military officers.

2. Officials in Ngara district had handed over 126 persons expelled by the Tanzanian authorities to the Kobero military unit, composed of seven gendarmes.

3. These persons - all members of PALIPEHUTU, a terrorist and genocidal movement - had been accused of fomenting unrest in camps in the north-west of the United Republic of Tanzania, where they were responsible for about a dozen deaths during clashes with rival groups, including the Conseil national pour la défense de la démocratie (National Council for the Defence of Democracy). It should be borne in mind that PALIPEHUTU regularly massacres innocent civilians, and its dastardly acts were in evidence in the Mugina district of Cibitoke province.

4. The terrorists in that movement are therefore not ordinary refugees, as is often claimed by some in the media and some international human rights organizations.

5. When the Kobero military unit took control of those PALIPEHUTU terrorists after the Tanzanian officials left, one of the terrorists - a woman, according to a report by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), as confirmed by the governmental commission of inquiry sent to the location - hurled a grenade at the security forces.

6. That was why the corporal in charge of the unit ordered his men to retaliate forthwith.

7. The Government condemns the irresponsible act that led to the death of all those people.

8. Those responsible for that serious incident were arrested immediately, and will be brought before the relevant military tribunal.

9. In the aftermath of that unfortunate incident, the Government decided to establish committees to handle returnees at the various posts on the border with the United Republic of Tanzania. The committees have clear instructions and their membership includes representatives of the Government and UNHCR.

10. The Government of Burundi takes this opportunity to renew its appeal to all Burundian refugees to return to their homeland, and pledges to receive them in conditions of utmost dignity, safety and security.

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